

To: EZN Members
Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
Heads of Christian Denominations, Zimbabwe
Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference
Zimbabwe Council of Churches
Zimbabwe Christian Alliance
Zimbabwe Student Christian Movement

Sister International and Regional Ecumenical Organisations

08 February 2010

Re: Briefing on the 4th Annual Meeting of the Ecumenical Zimbabwe Network

The Ecumenical Zimbabwe Network (EZN) met in Geneva on 21 - 22 January 2010 and hosted Zimbabwean Christian leaders from five umbrella organisations¹, to analyse the current situation in the country and discuss an ecumenical way forward for Zimbabwe in partnership. Against the background of almost a year of the Inclusive Government (IG), the meeting looked at how churches and church-related agencies should respond to the Global Political Agreement (GPA) and its problems of implementation.

The meeting was opened by Rev Dr Ishmael Noko, the Zimbabwean-born General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation and also greeted by the new General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit and the General Secretary of the World YWCA, Ms Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda. The Zimbabwean church leaders emphasised that the churches in Zimbabwe are more united than ever before and determined to ensure that the church maintains a proactive and lasting role in national transformation processes.

We focused on;

- i) The major challenges to and opportunities for recovery in 2010 and beyond.
- ii) The role of the churches in the National Healing and Reconciliation process.
- iii) The work of the churches in the constitutional reform process and preparations for elections.
- iv) The question of targeted 'sanctions' and international re-engagement with the government of Zimbabwe.
- v) The role of churches in engaging youth and overcoming a culture of violence.

Concerning the challenges and opportunities facing Zimbabwe during the current transitional period, we affirmed the need for a new and positive narrative on Zimbabwe in this new decade. Many Zimbabweans are expressing hope for the future and enthusiasm for a new era of democracy and prosperity. We noted the continuing stabilisation of the economy, re-opening of hospitals, clinics, schools, universities, repair work on water and sewage infrastructure.

¹ Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ); Heads of Christian Denominations(HOCD); Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference(ZCBC); Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC); Zimbabwe Christian Alliance(ZCA); Zimbabwe Student Christian Movement(SCMZ)

However, close to a year after the inception of the Inclusive Government, political tensions prevail and major contentious issues remain unresolved. We are concerned by the inability of the regional and international bodies especially SADC and the African Union as guarantors of the GPA to deal with violations of the agreement, such as freedom of expression and association.

The IG as a product of exclusive political party dialogue raises questions of democracy and consultation but the meeting recognised that it is a reality on the ground and has the seeds of a possible transformation to a fully functioning democracy and developmental state.

Concerning National Healing and Reconciliation, we learnt of the pivotal role being played by Zimbabwean churches and their partnership with civil society in the Churches and Civil Society Forum on National Healing (CCSF). The meeting underlined the importance of strengthening and supporting the Churches-Civil Society partnership under the CSSF framework.

We also noted, however, that real work on healing, justice and reconciliation is yet to begin. The state-led process under the GPA is paralysed through lack of enabling structures, legal framework and public legitimacy. The Organ on National Healing has no secretariat while the two ministers named by ZANU PF and MDC-M have relinquished their posts in the tripartite mechanism. We also noted the continuation of an embedded culture of violence and corruption that undermines national healing, constitutional debate and transitional justice. Many victims of violence are still living in fear as perpetrators continue to live in impunity. Repressive legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act remain in force.

While committed to pursuing a comprehensive process involving state, church and civil society actors, the churches expressed their determination to continue their own proactive work on healing and reconciliation. To enhance its credibility and independence the meeting noted that the healing and reconciliation process in Zimbabwe may need a structure such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Concerning the Constitutional Reform and Elections, we learnt of the churches' commitment to participating in the process of writing a home-grown constitution for Zimbabwe. Representatives of Zimbabwean churches are involved in the ongoing public outreach and consultations which are gathering the views on what Zimbabwean citizens want in the new constitution. The thematic committees have 70% civil society representation as opposed to 30% representation for Members of Parliament.

We noted, however, growing frustration with the increase in violent disruption to the process, growing insecurity for members of the outreach teams and the public, and the endless political bickering and bureaucratic obstacles.

Concerning 'targeted sanctions and international re-engagement', we held that restrictive measures aimed at individual politicians should be allowed to take their full course should there be no tangible and irreversible democratic reforms. In fact sanctions should not be tied down to the implementation of the Global Political Agreement only but to broader respect for human rights. The onus is on the Government of Zimbabwe to demonstrate its commitment to genuine reforms by respecting its obligations under international and regional treaties.

We also underlined, however, that targeted 'sanctions' should not have an impact on the health and livelihoods of ordinary citizens. The churches are ready to work with other partners to obtain clear information on the real impact of the sanctions and also ensure

clarity and consistency in the messages of the churches on the subject to fellow Zimbabweans and international partners.

Concerning church engagement with youth in the prevention of violence, the meeting was saddened that powerful politicians and other community leaders have abused young people as agents of violence to ensure the formers' hold on power. The Zimbabwean churches admitted their shortcomings in providing adequate space, support and guidance for youths outside their own denominations. We agreed that the youths are a very important stakeholder in the life of the nation and the church and the churches should do more to provide non-partisan training, mentoring, leadership and economic opportunities for them.

Conclusion

To ensure effective coordination of the work and commitments of the Ecumenical Zimbabwe Network, the meeting resolved that the Zimbabwe Advocacy Office in Geneva will be mandated with the role of a part-time secretariat.

It was also agreed that EZN will maintain the light structure nature of the network.

The meeting further resolved to explore in partnership how best to structure our relationship with Zimbabwean church bodies.

About EZN

EZN is an informal network of Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical agencies and organisations outside Zimbabwe as well as representatives of the Zimbabwean Church in the Diaspora. We exist to:

- share information about the situation in Zimbabwe as it impacts on civil society there and to share analysis of political developments.
- demonstrate solidarity with our partner organisations in Zimbabwe and through them with the Zimbabwean people. By demonstrating solidarity, we hope that voices within Zimbabwe will feel empowered to speak out about the injustices perpetrated in the country.
- on behalf of our Zimbabwean partners, lobby those groups and individuals who may be able to influence the situation in the country: regional groups such as SADC or the AU or potential donors such as the governments of our respective countries. We will also mobilise our respective constituencies to engage in similar lobbying and advocacy actions.
- organise and encourage prayer vigils for the achievement of peace and justice in Zimbabwe.
- collaborate with other networks and agencies which share common objectives.

Contact

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